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Oman pitches new port that could expand India's access to Gulf energy

Kallol Bhattacherjee
NEW DELHI

With the Strait of Hormuz in a chokehold due to Iran-U.S. hostilities, Oman has pitched investment opportunities to India in a new port that could provide uninterrupted access to energy resources from the Persian Gulf.

Speaking here on Wednesday, a high-level representative of the Sohar Port of Oman welcomed Indian investments into the port and said it would serve as a platform to connect businesses in regional and global markets.

"India represents an important and growing dimension of Sohar's international investment landscape, with established Indian businesses already contributing to our industrial ecosystem. There is significant potential to deepen this relationship through investments that complement our industrial clusters, strengthen value chains and create new opportunities for growth," said Raid Al Rubaiey, CEO of Sohar Freezone and Deputy CEO of Sohar Port. The port is located on the Omani coast on the Gulf of Oman, and ships can access hubs in the Gulf through this port as it sits far from the Strait of Hormuz.

The Sohar Port is located on the Omani coast on the Gulf of Oman, far from the Strait of Hormuz. FILE PHOTO

Mr. Rubaiey said that Sohar Port has received investments of over $30 billion and that it is capable of handling 72 million tonnes of cargo annually. "Sohar provides an established industrial and logistics platform connecting businesses to regional and global markets," he said.

The remarks came at the end of a two-day promotional event organised by the Embassy of Oman, during which the Ambassador of Oman, Issa Saleh Al Shibani, introduced the port and the Freezone to Indian businesses, manufacturers and exporters to increase Indian participation in the port.

Earlier, Oman had offered Duqm and Salalah ports to India, but the Sohar Port has the advantage of being located in the northeast of Oman, close to vital energy pipelines of the United Arab Emirates and eastern Saudi Arabia.

1. Oman Pitches Sohar Port to India

Source: The Hindu
GS-2: India–Oman Relations, Strategic Connectivity
GS-3: Energy Security, Ports & Maritime Infrastructure

1. Context

- Oman has invited Indian investment in **Sohar Port**, located on the **Gulf of Oman**, outside the Strait of Hormuz.
- The proposal is important for India because it can provide an **additional gateway to Gulf energy resources and regional markets**, particularly amid instability around the Strait of Hormuz.

2. Sohar Port: Basic Information

- Located in **northern Oman** on the Gulf of Oman, giving ships direct access to the Arabian Sea without passing through the Strait of Hormuz.
- Handles around **72 million tonnes of cargo annually** and has attracted investments of over **$30 billion**.
- Functions as an integrated **port, industrial and logistics hub**, offering opportunities for Indian manufacturers, exporters and businesses.
- Oman has already offered India access to **Duqm and Salalah**; Sohar provides another potential logistics and energy gateway.

3. India's Existing Overseas Port Access

- **Duqm, Oman:** India has access to facilities at the **Duqm Special Economic Zone, including the seaport, dry dock and airport, for Indian armed forces**.
- **Chabahar, Iran:** Indian-operated terminal providing connectivity towards **Afghanistan and Central Asia** while bypassing Pakistan.
- **Sittwe, Myanmar:** Developed with Indian assistance under the **Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project**, connecting India's Northeast with the Bay of Bengal.
- **Sabang, Indonesia:** Cooperation with Indonesia at a strategically located port near the **Malacca Strait**.
- **Salalah, Oman:** Commercial port providing another link between India and markets in West Asia and Africa.

4. How Overseas Port Access Benefits India

- **Energy Security:** Provides alternative routes for oil and gas imports and reduces vulnerability to disruption at major maritime chokepoints.
- **Trade & Connectivity:** Gives Indian companies direct access to regional markets and supports exports, logistics and supply chains.
- **Supply-Chain Resilience:** Multiple ports and routes reduce dependence on any single maritime corridor during geopolitical disruptions.
- **Strategic Maritime Reach:** Strengthens India's presence across the **Indian Ocean Region** and supports the security of Sea Lines of Communication.
- **Access to Key Regions:** Chabahar supports connectivity with Central Asia, Sittwe with Southeast Asia, while Omani ports strengthen India's access to West Asia and Africa.
- **Strategic Autonomy:** A diversified network of overseas port access gives India greater flexibility in managing **energy, trade and maritime-security interests**.

Along the coasts and in the sea, the dawn of a sunrise sector

C P RADHAKRISHNAN

THE LEADERSHIP of Prime Minister Narendra Modi has ensured that Bharat's growth story is always *sabka saath, sabka vikas, sabka vishwas, sabka prayaas*. In the past 25 years, he has touched the lives of crores of people, especially those belonging to the weaker and disadvantaged sections.

Referring to backward districts as "Aspirational Districts", border villages as "Vibrant and First Villages" and the Northeast as *Ashtalakshmi* reflects a transformative approach that has transformed geographical marginalisation into empowerment.

Another major step towards ensuring inclusive growth has been our focus on the Blue Economy. In the 1960s, with the Green Revolution, we tackled the problem of acute hunger. Bharat today ranks among the top global producers of rice, wheat, pulses, and millets, reinforcing its role in global food security. The White Revolution ended India's chronic milk shortage and dependence on imported dairy products. Bharat is now the world's No. 1 milk-producing country and, as a result, protein deficiency has drastically reduced, especially among children.

The Blue Revolution is set to be another success story. Nature has blessed our country with more than 11,000 km of coastline. We have a rich maritime tradition. We have an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) extending over nearly 24 lakh square km. Bharat has a large amount of marine wealth. Yet much of this potential remained untapped for decades. Most of our fishing activity remained close to the shore. Today, we are ready to look beyond the horizon. The deep waters of our EEZ and the high seas present immense opportunities for sustainable harvesting of high-value fish such as tuna.

In 2019, with the creation of the Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying, the fisheries sector got a ministry of its own for the first time. PM Modi had said that the blue *chakra* in our national flag represents the potential of the Blue Revolution and the ocean economy.

ILLUSTRATION: C R SASIKUMAR

In the past decade, India's fisheries and aquaculture sector has emerged as a sunrise sector. Bharat is now the second largest fish-producing country, contributing around 8 per cent to global fish production. The sector supports the livelihoods of nearly 3 crore fishermen and fish farmers and contributes significantly to food security and nutrition. India's fish production reached more than 195 lakh tonnes in 2024-25.

I recently attended two events organised by the Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying. One was the national launch programme for promoting sustainable harnessing of fisheries in the high seas and providing letters of authorisation to Indian-flagged vessels in Odisha. The second was the fisheries outreach programme in Lakshadweep. In Odisha, I was pleased to inaugurate the initiative taken by the ministry. It reflected the collective resolve of the Union government, the state government, our institutions, and our fishing communities to move towards a new era of growth, sustainability and prosperity in marine fisheries. When I visited Lakshadweep last month on my first official visit as Vice President, I was extremely pleased to note that many fisheries development projects have been approved for Lakshadweep under the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana.

> Deep-sea and high-seas fisheries can create employment not only in harvesting, but also in processing, cold chain, transportation, packaging, logistics and export services

The Union Budget 2025-26 recognised the untapped potential of the deep waters of our EEZ and announced an enabling framework for sustainable harnessing of fisheries from the EEZ and the high seas. This progressive framework enables our fishermen to venture confidently into these new frontiers. I am particularly happy that the new framework places our fishermen at its centre. The Fisheries Rules for the EEZ and the Guidelines for Fisheries in the High Seas in 2025 mark a new beginning for Mother Bharat. It gives priority to issuing letters of authorisation to fisheries co-operatives, Fish Farmer Producer Organisations and Indian fishermen. Lakshadweep, with a land area of about 32 square km, has nearly 145 km of coastline, a lagoon area of about 4,200 square km, territorial waters extending over 20,000 square km and an Exclusive Economic Zone of about 4 lakh square km. It alone accounts for nearly one-sixth of India's EEZ. This is our true maritime strength, which sends out a powerful message. When individuals work alone, they do make progress, but when they work together as a team, they create a transformation.

India's seafood today reaches more than 120 countries. During the last financial year alone, our exports touched an impressive figure of more than Rs 73,000 crore, an increase of over 140 per cent since 2013-2014. The world has developed confidence and belief in the quality of Indian seafood. Digital authorisation systems, vessel tracking, international certification, and other steps will help Indian seafood command even greater respect in premium global markets. However, as we pursue growth, we must never forget our responsibility towards nature. The sea has nourished humanity for thousands of years. It is our sacred duty to preserve it for thousands of years to come. Sustainable fishing is a moral responsibility. The new guidelines are a positive step in this direction. They rightly emphasise compliance with conservation measures and a firm stand against illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing.

Deep-sea and high-seas fisheries can create employment not only in harvesting, but also in processing, cold chain, transportation, packaging, logistics and export services. It can create opportunities for our youth. It can provide greater participation for women in processing and value addition. It can strengthen the economic life of coastal India.

As we move towards Viksit Bharat @ 2047, we are committed to making the Blue Economy inclusive and sustainable. In this journey of the Blue Revolution, each sector has a job to do. Our fishing communities will power India's Blue Economy. I am glad that the Fisheries Ministry, under the leadership of PM Modi, is making significant strides towards a new era of growth, sustainability and prosperity.

I urge the youth to view fishing not as an inherited occupation alone but as a modern profession driven by science, technology, innovation and global opportunity. I urge our institutions to continue supporting our fishing community with knowledge, technology and finance. So let us move forward with confidence, and together build a stronger coastal Mother Bharat.

The writer is Vice President of India

14. समुद्री धाराओं को प्रभावित करने वाली शक्तियाँ कौन सी हैं ? विश्व के मत्स्य-उद्योग में इनके योगदान का वर्णन करें । (250 शब्दों में उत्तर दें)

What are the forces that influence ocean currents ? Describe their role in fishing industry of the world. (Answer in 250 words) 15

2. Along the Coasts and in the Sea, the Dawn of a Sunrise Sector

Source: The Indian Express

GS-3: Blue Economy, Fisheries, Coastal Economy, Sustainable Development

1. Context

- India's **Blue Economy** is emerging as an important avenue for growth, employment and coastal development.
- India has a coastline of over **11,000 km** and an **Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of nearly 24 lakh sq. km.**, offering considerable marine-resource potential.

2. Fisheries: Emerging Potential

- India is a major fish-producing country, contributing around **8% of global fish production** and supporting nearly **3 crore fishers and fish farmers**.
- Fish production crossed **195 lakh tonnes in 2024–25**, while seafood exports have exceeded **₹73,000 crore**.
- The sector has potential beyond fishing through **processing, cold chains, packaging, transportation, logistics and exports**.
- **Deep-sea and high-seas fisheries** can help India utilise its EEZ more effectively and expand opportunities for coastal communities.

3. Government Measures

- The creation of the **Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying in 2019** provided dedicated institutional focus to the sector.
- **Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY)** promotes modernisation, infrastructure, productivity and sustainable fisheries.
- The **Fisheries Rules for the EEZ and Guidelines for Fisheries in the High Seas, 2025** provide a framework for responsible fishing.
- The **Union Budget 2025–26** recognised the potential of deep-sea fisheries and provided an enabling framework for sustainable utilisation of the EEZ.
- **Lakshadweep**, with its extensive lagoon, territorial waters and EEZ, represents an important area for sustainable marine-fisheries development.

4. Challenges

- **Overfishing and IUU fishing:** Can reduce fish stocks and undermine sustainable livelihoods.
- **Limited deep-sea capacity:** Need for better vessels, technology, skills and finance for fishermen.
- **Infrastructure gaps:** Inadequate cold storage, processing and logistics limit value addition and increase losses.
- **Climate and ecological pressures:** Changing marine conditions, pollution and degradation of coastal ecosystems affect fisheries.
- **Uneven value addition:** Greater processing and branding are required to capture higher value from seafood exports.

5. Way Forward

- Develop **deep-sea fishing, aquaculture and marine processing** through technology and scientific management.
- Strengthen **cold-chain, storage, processing and export infrastructure**.
- Promote sustainable fishing and strengthen monitoring against **IUU fishing**.
- Increase participation of **women and youth** in processing, entrepreneurship and allied activities.
- Ensure that expansion of the Blue Economy remains consistent with **marine conservation and the long-term interests of coastal communities**.
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EU chief offers Canada bloc's 'Associate Membership'; proposes new security body

Sriram Lakshman

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, on Wednesday, invited Canada to be the bloc's first 'Associate Member'. Delivering her annual State of the Union address in Strasbourg, France, in the presence of Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney, Ms. Von der Leyen described "the cold fragility of today's world" where "old assumptions and relationships have frayed".

"I would like to work with you on opening the door for Canada to be the first associate member of the European Union," she said, without elaborating on the structure of this proposed association.

Ms. Von der Leyen listed the ways in which the EU and Canada had converging interests, adding that "above all, Europe and Canada believe in democracy".

"That power does not belong to the strongest, richest, and loudest, but to all of us," she said, in a possible reference to the U.S. However, Ms. Von der Leyen added that the proposed relationship was not against anyone.

Her remarks come days after U.S. President Donald Trump launched a trade war on Canada. Relations between Brussels and Washington have also frayed significantly and undergone a recalibration over tensions around trade and the U.S. pulling back from Europe's defence.

Mr. Carney, too, had called for "middle powers" to act together, earlier this year at the World Economic Forum in Davos and has accelerated deepening ties with other countries, including India.

In Strasbourg, Ms. Von der Leyen also proposed the setting up of a 'European Security Council' with partners such as Canada, Norway, the U.K and Ukraine.

Accusing Russia of European air space violations, the EU's executive chief, said it was time for a new security strategy. "Our systems are made for a different world. They are driven by well-intentioned attempts at consensus and compromise, but we need to consider if they are still fit for purpose."

3. EU Offers Canada 'Associate Membership'; Proposes New Security Body

Source: The Hindu
GS-2: International Relations — European Union, Global Security, Strategic Partnerships

1. Context

- European Commission President **Ursula von der Leyen** has proposed that **Canada become the European Union's first associate member**.
- She has simultaneously proposed a **European Security Council** to bring the EU and selected partner countries into closer security coordination.

2. European Union: Institutional Basics

- The **European Union (EU)** is a union of **27 European states** based on economic and political integration, with certain powers exercised collectively through common institutions.
- **European Council:** Comprises the heads of state or government of EU member states. It sets the **overall political direction and priorities** of the Union.
- **European Commission:** Acts as the EU's executive body. It **proposes legislation, implements EU policies and manages the EU budget**.
- **European Parliament:** Directly elected by EU citizens. It participates in **legislation, budgetary decisions and democratic oversight**.
- **Council of the European Union:** Represents the governments of member states through their ministers. Along with the European Parliament, it **adopts EU legislation**.
- **Court of Justice of the European Union:** Ensures that EU law is interpreted and applied uniformly across member states.
- The EU's major economic foundation is the **Single Market**, based on the free movement of **goods, services, capital and people**.

3. Proposed Associate Membership for Canada

- The proposal is for a relationship **below full EU membership**, allowing Canada to deepen institutional cooperation with the Union while remaining outside it.
- Areas identified for closer cooperation include **defence, energy, critical minerals, artificial intelligence, quantum technology and economic security**.
- **Associate membership is not presently an established category under the EU treaties**; therefore, its precise rights, obligations and institutional arrangements would have to be negotiated.
- The proposal builds on existing EU–Canada cooperation, including the **Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA)**.

4. Proposed European Security Council

- The proposed **European Security Council** would provide a political forum for the **EU and selected non-EU partners**, including **Canada, the United Kingdom, Norway and Ukraine**, to discuss and coordinate responses to security challenges.
- It is intended to strengthen coordination against **hybrid and emerging threats**, including sabotage, cyberattacks and drone-related incidents.

- The proposal seeks to bring countries with significant security interests in Europe into a more regular framework of consultation and coordinated action.

5. Significance

- **Strategic cooperation:** Expands the EU's partnerships beyond its immediate membership.
- **Economic security:** Critical minerals, energy and advanced technologies are increasingly linked with national security.
- **Hybrid threats:** Creates greater scope for coordinated responses to security challenges that do not necessarily take the form of conventional military conflict.
- **Flexible partnerships:** The Canada proposal represents an attempt to develop a relationship between conventional external partnership and full membership.
- **India:** Relevant to the evolving role of **strategic partnerships, middle-power cooperation and diversification of international relationships**.

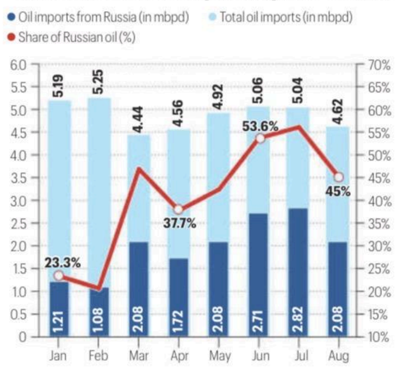
• ECONOMY

Russia sanctions Bill: Tool for Trump, worry for India

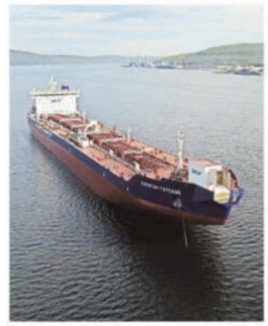
Implementing the Bill's 100% tariffs on top Russian oil importers could upend the energy market. Will Trump use it as leverage in trade talks?

SUKALP SHARMA & RAVI DUTTA MISHRA

• Russian oil makes up nearly half of India's oil imports



SOURCE: KPLER. **MBPD:** MILLION BARRELS PER DAY



A Russian tanker. India depends on imports to meet over 88% of its energy needs, and Russian oil is a key part of that mix. GETTY

THE US House of Representatives on Wednesday passed a sweeping Bill aimed at squeezing Russia's revenue from oil and gas exports amid the war in Ukraine. The Bill includes provisions for charging up to 100% tariffs on the top five buyers of Russian energy — India is the second-biggest export market for Russian crude.

The 'Lindsey O. Graham Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act of 2026' — a watered-down version of a proposed legislation initially backed by the late US senator and named after him — received the US Senate's (upper house) approval last month.

The Bill, which gives discretionary powers to Donald Trump on implementing its provisions, now just needs the US President's sign-off after the lower house's vote.

For India, the developments are significant. The country depends on imports to meet over 88% of its crude oil needs, and Russia currently accounts for nearly half of these imports. It remains to be seen if and when Trump turns the Bill into law through his signature, and how his administration implements its provisions, given the energy market crisis amid the West Asia conflict.

A key point to remember is that the Bill does offer some room for workarounds and concessions from Washington. One thing appears certain though: A law like this will give the Trump administration an additional lever to potentially exert pressure on India at a crucial stage in the bilateral trade agreement negotiations.

The Ministry of External Affairs said on Thursday that the government remains committed to ensuring the nation's energy security "through diversified sourcing and on the basis of evolving market dynamics".

The Bill and the energy market

Even for Trump, taking away millions of barrels of Russian oil from the global market when energy flows from West Asia remain highly constrained wouldn't be prudent.

In that context, it's worth noting that earlier this week, Trump called on Ukraine to halt strikes on Russian refineries, given the runaway oil and petroleum product prices amid stifled supplies in the global market. So will he now risk taking more Russian oil off the market by imposing punitive tariffs on countries buying Russian crude in large quantities?

At least till the West Asia crisis persists, Trump might want to exercise restraint and caution in implementing the proposed legislation in full force.

Doing the opposite would worsen an already worrying supply situation and send oil and fuel prices soaring even higher, something that the Trump administration wouldn't want ahead of the midterm polls in the US later this year.

On its part, India would most certainly move to communicate its energy concerns to Washington, something that was done last year as well when the original draft of the Bill was mooted.

India has been in touch with US authorities over the proposed legislation. The MEA statement said: "This issue has been discussed at high levels in recent months with various US interlocutors. Its potential implications for not just the bilateral relationship but also the international energy market have been very clearly articulated by the Indian side."

Supply shock

For India, meaningfully reducing Russian oil imports is just not an option amid the plunge in supplies from West Asia.

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For the same reason, it would also be a bad idea for the US to remove millions of barrels of Russian oil from the global market.

"Passing the Bill under these circumstances would be economic insanity, even for the US itself," Abu Dhabi-based energy analyst Natalia Katona told *The Indian Express* on Wednesday. "US diesel crack spreads (margins) have already reached $114 per barrel, largely because of the absence of Russian diesel from the market. Any logical economic assessment would argue against passing this Bill. However, given the level of political opportunism within the current administration and its apparent economic blindness, we should be prepared for anything," she said.

Trade talks

Apart from energy flows, the Bill creates a second worry for India. It is yet to enter into a trade agreement with the US — it had only signed a framework agreement in February — and the US President might use the proposed law as leverage to exert pressure on Indian negotiators.

In fact, before the US Supreme Court struck down Trump's tariff powers, the US President had indeed threatened India with reciprocal tariffs amid the trade negotiations.

Trump in February had lost the authority to impose "reciprocal tariffs" after the US Supreme Court had ruled that the US president's did not have the authority under the 1977 International Emergency Economic Powers Act to impose broad import duties. Since then, the administration has been finding newer ways to impose trade restrictions.

Now, trade experts say that Congressional approval places Russian oil-related tariffs on stronger legal ground. If the Act is signed, the US Trade Representative will identify the targeted countries and recommend tariff rates. These countries would normally have 180 days to reduce Russian energy imports or negotiate with Washington. The Bill does give powers to the US President to waive the application of its provisions, India is expected to push for those, if the Bill comes into force, according to industry experts and analysts.

The new version of the Bill proposes tariffs of up to 100% on the top five buyers of Russian oil and natural gas, against the proposal of a blanket 500% tariff on buyers of Russian energy in the original version.

While this reduction in proposed tariffs appears meaningful on paper, the cap is still too high for India.

Why Russian oil is key

With much of the West shunning Russian crude following the country's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Russia began offering discounts on its oil to willing buyers. This is how a peripheral supplier became India's biggest source of crude, displacing traditional West Asian suppliers.

Last year, the US did impose additional penal tariffs on India over its Russian oil imports, which was followed by a sizeable reduction in New Delhi's imports of Moscow's crude. But the West Asia war turned the trend on its head, as Russia was the only viable supplier of scale for an energy import-dependent India.

Analysts say that despite the threat of sanctions, Russian crude remains the most practical and competitive source of supply for Indian refiners and is extremely difficult to replace in the current market.

According to vessel tracking data from Kpler, India imported 2.08 million barrels per day of Russian oil in August, accounting for 45% of its total oil imports.

4. U.S. Clears Russia Sanctions Bill; India Faces Tariff Threat

Source: The Hindu

GS-2: India–US Relations, Russia–Ukraine Conflict, International Trade

GS-3: Energy Security, Crude Oil, Global Energy Market

1. Context

- The **U.S. House of Representatives has passed the Russia sanctions Bill**, which authorises the U.S. President to impose tariffs of up to **100%** on countries purchasing Russian oil and gas.
- The provision is significant for India because of its substantial dependence on **Russian crude oil**.

2. India's Dependence on Russian Crude

- **Import dependence:** India meets **over 88%** of its crude-oil requirement through imports.
- **Russia's position:** Russia is India's **largest crude-oil supplier**.
- **July 2026:** Russian crude accounted for **over 51%** of India's oil imports.
- **August 2026:** Russian crude imports were around **2.08 million barrels per day (mbpd)**, about **45%** of total imports.
- **Post-2022 shift:** Russian oil purchases increased substantially after discounted crude became available following Western sanctions on Russia.
- **Strategic significance:** Russian crude has become an important component of India's **energy-security and supply-diversification strategy**.

3. What the U.S. Bill Provides

- The legislation targets the **five largest purchasers of Russian petroleum or natural gas**.
- It authorises tariffs of up to **100% on goods imported from such countries**.
- It also provides for measures against entities and vessels associated with Russia's **"shadow fleet"**.
- The U.S. President would have powers to **waive the measures in the national interest**.
- The Bill therefore creates a potential **secondary economic pressure** on countries maintaining substantial Russian-energy purchases.

4. Implications for India

- **Energy security:** Replacing Russian crude on a large scale would require greater purchases from alternative suppliers.
- **Oil-price risk:** Disruption of Russian supplies could tighten global crude markets and raise prices.
- **Import bill:** Higher crude prices would increase India's petroleum import expenditure and could widen the trade deficit.
- **Domestic economy:** Higher energy costs can raise transportation, production and consumer-price pressures.
- **Exports:** Higher U.S. tariffs could reduce the competitiveness of Indian exports in the U.S. market.
- **Strategic balancing:** India would have to manage its energy requirements alongside its **India–US economic relationship and strategic ties with Russia**.

5. India’s Position

- The **Ministry of External Affairs** has reiterated India’s commitment to ensuring energy security through **diversified sourcing**.
- India has also highlighted that measures affecting Russian energy trade can have implications for the **international energy market**, apart from bilateral relations.
- The situation reinforces the need for **diversification of suppliers, flexible procurement and greater resilience in energy security**.

Does the BRICS summit signify a shift for Indian foreign policy?

Ajay Bisaria

served as High Commissioner to Pakistan and Canada and is the author of ‘Anger Management: The Troubled Diplomatic Relationship Between India and Pakistan’

Happymon Jacob

Author of ‘India after Non-Alignment’

PARLEY

With a strong pushback against unilateral western sanctions; criticism of Israel over the killing of civilians, the attacks on Lebanon, and the forced occupation of Palestinian territory; and support for UN reform as well as a BRICS payment mechanism, the New Delhi Declaration of 2026 has been likened to India’s foreign policy from its non-aligned past. But was it a compromise by New Delhi to build consensus, or will the statement, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s close engagement with the leaders of Iran, Russia, and China, have a bearing on India’s foreign policy? Ajay Bisaria and Happymon Jacob discuss the question in a conversation moderated by **Suhasini Haidar**.

Is the New Delhi declaration a return to non-alignment or just momentary rhetoric?

Ajay Bisaria: Broadly, the declaration is in keeping with India’s foreign policy, whether that is strategic autonomy and multi-alignment or multi-vector engagement. In terms of optics, India is more on the front foot and less apologetic than it used to be. India is getting more and more comfortable in a non-western forum, saying that it is emphatically part of it. While it doesn’t necessarily mean a shift in posture, it does suggest a greater degree of comfort with a different set of optics.

Happymon Jacob: The BRICS summit is under spotlight and things under spotlight look bigger and shinier than they really are. BRICS is a political platform; not a security platform. I don’t think India’s policy today is that of non-alignment at all. Non-alignment was a strategy for a weak state in a bipolar world. Today, we are in a different kind of world and the desire in India is to become one of the poles in a multipolar world. There is a reference to the Bandung Spirit (Non-Aligned Movement) in the BRICS declaration in pursuit of a fairer, more inclusive, and representative multilateral system. But that is nostalgia, not real policy.

How important are optics such as the Modi-Xi-Putin handshakes or the Prime Minister reaching out to the Iranian President at a time when these leaders represent the “anti-Western lobby”?

HJ: The optics are, in some ways, the substance here. Chinese President Xi Jinping had not been to India in nearly seven years. And we had the Abu Dhabi Crown Prince (Khaled bin Zayed Al Nahyan) sitting at the same table. In some ways, the photograph is the message. At the BRICS

Russia’s President Vladimir Putin, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and China’s President Xi Jinping pose with other leaders during the BRICS Summit. AFP

outreach session, a lot of powers who don’t otherwise get into great power conversations were present. So, there was a lot of socialisation happening inside the platform and on its margins. But I think we should understand that this is not really having an impact on how the world is being shaped. The declaration calls for exercising restraint and protecting civilians and civilian infrastructure and pointedly recalls the respective national positions of each member. It is fantastic, but the argument here is about optics, not common positions.

AB: I would agree that these multilateral fora are often performative to a degree and therefore all optics matter. But in a multilateral document, you can say the silent part aloud; what a country won’t say in a national statement, it can say aloud in a high-level multilateral summit. For instance, everyone knows that the phrase “unilateral coercive measures” is about U.S. actions. So, you’re not really saying we condemn U.S. action on so-and-so date; you’re simply saying that we are against U.S. tariffs and [western] sanctions. There is an understanding now that what is said in a multilateral document can be different from a national position.

Every BRICS summit since 2022, including the 2024 summit in Russia, has made a reference to Ukraine. The New Delhi Declaration is the first time that references to Ukraine have been dropped. Why?

AB: My guess would be that it was a Russian veto. In the Rio BRICS declaration last year, there was even condemnation of a Ukrainian attack on Russia without an equivalent condemnation of anything Russia had done. So this time, instead of just condemning Ukraine, they might have decided to drop the whole thing entirely. It is very disappointing that a major multilateral geopolitical forum doesn’t call for belligerents to end the war, but instead stays silent. That is an error of omission. I suspect the

> Broadly, the Delhi declaration is in keeping with India’s foreign policy, whether that is strategic autonomy and multi-alignment or multi-vector engagement
>
> AJAY BISARIA

Russians said, no, we don’t accept it, and in the interest of having a consensus, it was dropped.

HJ: I think India has no particular reason to push for that language to be present in the declaration because we have quite clearly sided with the Russian Federation in this war, indirectly if not directly. There must have been Russian push but I see no reason why there could not have been some neutral language to put in [references to Ukraine], given the precedent (of previous BRICS joint declarations).

The condemnation of Israel in the statement is very strong. Does this represent a shift for India given the PM’s speech on standing “shoulder to shoulder” with Israel during his visit in February 2026?

AB: The big picture is that India is trying to establish neutral and balanced positions on both conflicts, and therefore not be seen as backing only one side in either. It has taken safety in the language of the United Nations. There’s a specific mention of the UN Security Council Resolution 2803 of November last year, which spoke about an International Stabilisation Force and a Board of Peace. Some of the language has been drawn from there. The overall posture is: let’s try to be balanced and reasonably neutral.

HJ: There is a clear disjunction between the statement and what Prime Minister Modi told the Israeli parliament. Perhaps the declaration is in some way intended to counter the perception that India was getting too close to Israel. The two-state solution has always been India’s position, so the declaration doesn’t contradict Indian policy there. But with the UAE, Egypt, Iran, and Indonesia in the room, there was only so much India could do to push back against the harshness of that language. What Prime Minister Modi told the Israelis in Israel is emotional and consequential. But what is written in the BRICS Declaration is multilateral, symbolic, and not very consequential. I would still say the balance is tilted in favour of Israel as a partner.

How significant are the paragraphs on economic issues, particularly on intra-BRICS trade using payments in national currencies? These 10 or 11 countries represent 40% of the global economy, and 25% of global trade. Could they pose a challenge to the G7?

HJ: Indian policy has two parts. One is the support for local currency payment mechanisms. I don’t think India has supported a permanent payment mechanism under the ambit of BRICS. I think there is an acknowledgement that there is no one-size-fits-all approach as far as currency settlement payment mechanisms are concerned. I would think twice before signing on to a non-U.S. dollar payment mechanism, which I believe will mean the next big currency or the next powerful currency. And unfortunately, China’s currency is going to be that big currency.

AB: BRICS is a counterpoint to the G7, an economic grouping that also has geopolitical responsibilities. But I think India also finds itself at an intersection with the G7, because it is a sort of permanent invitee to the G7, along with Australia and South Korea. I have made the argument elsewhere that the G7 should dissolve itself and become the Democratic 10 (D10), including these three countries. I think that is the real strategic autonomy or multi-vector engagement, where India becomes the bridge between the east and the west, but also a voice of the south.

Will any of the decisions at BRICS see their way into future Indian foreign policy? Or is this just one moment with BRICS countries?

AB: I think this is a moment of success in Indian diplomacy in terms of conducting a major international event. In November, there will be another opportunity to meet global leaders at the ASEAN-East Asia Summit in the Philippines, followed by Prime Minister Modi’s visits to the U.S., Canada, and Brussels, where he could potentially secure three trade agreements. I think that’s what diplomacy will be about: multi-vector engagement; keeping all stakeholders engaged, in multiple directions.

HJ: India has only so much diplomatic capital. Therefore, it is important to pick our battles, forums, and partners. I think we should be present in those rooms where global rules on AI are being framed, and where the future of space governance is discussed. I don’t think the next world order is going to be made in forums such as the BRICS but in those silent small rooms.

To listen to the full interview
Scan the code or go to the link
www.thehindu.com

5. Does the BRICS Summit Signify a Shift for Indian Foreign Policy?

Source: The Hindu
GS-2: International Relations — Indian Foreign Policy, BRICS, Strategic Autonomy, Multi-alignment

1. Context

- The **18th BRICS Summit**, held in New Delhi on **12–13 September 2026**, adopted the **New Delhi Declaration**.
- India's engagement with Russia, China and Iran, along with the Declaration's positions on sanctions, global governance and West Asia, has raised the question of whether India's foreign-policy orientation is changing.

2. India's Current Foreign Policy

- **Strategic autonomy:** Maintain independent decision-making and avoid dependence on any single major power.
- **Multi-alignment:** Simultaneously engage with different and competing power centres according to national interests.
- **Global South diplomacy:** Push for greater representation of developing countries in global institutions.
- **Issue-based partnerships:** Work with different countries and groupings depending on the specific issue.
- **Diversified engagement:** India participates in platforms such as **BRICS, G20, SCO, Quad** and maintains bilateral partnerships across geopolitical blocs.

3. What at the BRICS Summit Created the Impression of a Shift?

- **Russia and China:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi held high-level meetings with **Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping** at the summit.
- **Iran:** Iranian President **Masoud Pezeshkian was invited to the summit**, providing a platform for high-level India–Iran engagement.
- **Unilateral sanctions:** The New Delhi Declaration opposed **unilateral economic and secondary sanctions** contrary to international law.
- **West Asia:** The Declaration gave significant attention to the **Palestinian issue, civilian protection and conflicts in West Asia**.
- **Ukraine:** The 2026 Declaration contained **no direct reference to Ukraine**, unlike several earlier BRICS declarations.
- **Financial cooperation:** BRICS continued discussions on **local-currency settlements and cross-border payment mechanisms**.
- **Global governance:** The Declaration called for greater representation of **emerging markets and developing countries** in global institutions.

4. Does This Indicate a Change in India's Foreign Policy?

- **Continuity in strategic autonomy:** India continues to maintain relationships with the **US, Europe, Russia, China and the Global South** rather than aligning exclusively with one bloc.

- **Greater BRICS engagement:** India is using BRICS more actively for **Global South representation, multilateral reform and economic cooperation**.
- **Closer engagement with non-Western powers:** High-level interaction with Russia and China and the invitation to Iran gave the summit a stronger non-Western dimension.
- **Independent position on sanctions:** India's participation in a declaration opposing unilateral sanctions reflects its long-standing preference for **sovereign policy space**.
- **Ukraine:** The absence of a direct reference to Ukraine was notable, but it should not by itself be treated as evidence of a change in India's Russia or Western policy.
- **Continued Western engagement:** India continues substantial cooperation with Western countries in **trade, defence, technology and the Indo-Pacific**.
- **Change in emphasis:** The developments indicate a **greater diplomatic emphasis and confidence in non-Western platforms**, rather than an established change in the basic framework of Indian foreign policy.

• CLIMATE

How melting glaciers could 'put 20% of GDP at risk'

Yashee

New Delhi, September 17

WHILE THE Himalayas' melting glaciers are under the spotlight due to the Nepal floods, damage from the warming mountains also means economic drain — as glaciers retreat, water supplies become less reliable and the rivers that sustain agriculture, industry, cities and hydropower change. A new report puts a number to this economic dependence: More than a fifth of India's GDP is underpinned by the Himalayas.

The report, 'A resilient Himalaya: protecting a region at risk and securing future prosperity', was compiled by the consultancy Systemiq, in partnership with Integrated Mountain Initiative, and supported by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development, Nepal, and GB Pant National Institute of Himalayan Environment, Uttarakhand. The report estimates that Rs 64.8 lakh crore, 21.5% of India's FY24 GDP, is dependent on the Himalayas.

Glaciers and the economy

The Himalayas feed the Indus, Ganga and Brahmaputra river systems, supporting agriculture, cities and industry downstream. "The rivers that carry risk downstream also carry the water that sustains India's economy: wheat and rice across the Indo-Gangetic plain, tea in Assam and Bengal, hydropower in the Northeast, and pilgrimage economics in downstream towns," the report says

6. How Melting Glaciers Could Put 20% of GDP at Risk

Source: The Indian Express
GS-1: Geography — Himalayas, Glaciers, River Systems
GS-3: Environment — Climate Change, Water Security, Disaster Management

1. Context

- A report titled **"A Resilient Himalaya: Protecting a Region at Risk and Securing Future Prosperity"** estimates that **₹64.8 lakh crore, or 21.5% of India's FY24 GDP, is dependent on the Himalayas**.
- Accelerating glacier melt threatens the reliability of water flows supporting **agriculture, industry, cities and hydropower**.

2. Himalayas and India's Economy

- **River systems:** The Himalayas feed the **Indus, Ganga and Brahmaputra** systems.
- **Agriculture:** Himalayan rivers support major agricultural production, including **wheat and rice in the Indo-Gangetic Plain**.
- **Industry and cities:** Downstream industries and urban centres depend on Himalayan-fed rivers and groundwater recharge.
- **Hydropower:** Himalayan river systems are particularly important for **hydropower generation**, including in the Northeast.
- **Economic estimate:** The report's **21.5% GDP figure** covers direct Himalayan economic activity, downstream economic activity and wider supply-chain and spending effects.

3. Glacier Melt and "Peak Water"

- **Natural water storage:** Glaciers store water as ice and release meltwater into rivers, particularly during the dry season.
- **Initial effect:** Faster warming can temporarily increase glacier melt and river flows.
- **Peak Water:** Himalayan river basins are expected to reach **"Peak Water" around the middle of this century**, when glacier-derived runoff reaches its maximum.
- **Post-Peak risk:** As glacier ice reserves shrink, meltwater contribution can decline, increasing long-term **water-security risks**.

4. Black Carbon and Glacier Melting

- **Black carbon:** Produced through incomplete combustion, it settles on snow and reduces its reflectivity, increasing absorption of solar radiation and accelerating melting.

- **Major sources:** The report highlights **brick kilns, cookstoves, transport and crop-residue burning**.
- **Zigzag kilns:** Conversion to zigzag technology can reduce **black-carbon and particulate emissions by about 70%** and fuel consumption by **20–30%**.
- **Adoption gap:** Punjab and Haryana have completed the transition, while **Uttar Pradesh has converted around 56% of its kilns**.

5. Wider Risks

- **Disaster vulnerability:** The Himalayas account for about **18% of India's land area but around 35% of its disasters**, according to the report.
- **Economic disruption:** Floods, landslides and other climate-related disasters can disrupt **food production, water supply, infrastructure and supply chains**.
- **Fiscal pressure:** Repeated disaster losses and reconstruction can divert resources from **long-term resilience and development**.

6. Way Forward

- **Reduce black carbon:** Accelerate clean technologies in brick kilns, transport, household energy and agricultural burning.
- **Strengthen water management:** Improve glacier and river monitoring, groundwater management and climate-resilient irrigation.
- **Build resilient infrastructure:** Integrate climate and disaster-risk assessments into Himalayan infrastructure planning.
- **Adopt a landscape approach:** Coordinate action across Himalayan States and downstream regions because the impacts extend beyond the mountain region.